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FOOTPRINT

*H. H. H. H.*

These stories were all entered for the competition in STAG newsletter No. 15, for a story entitled 'The Yeti's Footprint', the winner being the story by Elizabeth Sharp.

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This publication costs 50p including postage. Contact  
Beth Hallam  
Flat 3  
36 Clapham Rd.  
Bedford  
England.

## Story by R.H.

Within minutes of receiving the distress call, the survivor was beamed aboard. McCoy's giving him a clean bill of health ensured that Kirk could begin his interrogation almost immediately. Never tolerant of loose ends, he was eager to get the chore settled and resume his current mission. Besides, there were events surrounding this rescue that were, to say the least, giving him concern.

McCoy made the introductions as Kirk stepped through the door to the briefing room.

"Jim, let me present Milo Carne, pilot, and, for want of a better term, explorer. Mr. Carne, James Kirk, Captain of the Federation Starship, the U.S.S. Enterprise."

Kirk raised an eyebrow. "Explorer? And what, may I ask, were you exploring way out here?"

"The planet you were so kind as to rescue me from, Captain." Kirk walked towards the table at the centre of the briefing room, dismissing the odd, brown objects on it with a cursory glance. He regarded the other pilot with a shrewd expression on his face. He had seen the type many times before - loners, usually retired or pensioned off from the service - or, more often than not, court-martialled out. Blessed with a strange mixture of low cunning and haphazard, impulse driven emotions, they were in any book a force to be reckoned with.

A pair of dark eyes twinkled back from an otherwise emotionless face as he spoke.

"What happened to your ship?"

"Stolen."

Kirk should have expected this. He could see that he was going to have trouble getting any satisfactory answer from the pilot without some considerable effort. He tried again.

"By whom?"

"My partners."

"And?"

"And what?" The pilot lounged in the chair across the table from Kirk. As for the Starfleet commander, he could have quite happily strangled the man where he sat.

Kirk spoke slowly, carefully, willing his voice to be deceptively calm.

"Mr. Carne. If we are to be of any help, you'll have to cooperate. Just answer our questions, volunteer a few more answers."

Carne pulled a lop-sided grimace - something between a smile and a frown, as if only in control of half his facial muscles.

"My two, uh, business partners and I had a conflict of ideals..."

"You had a fight," translated Kirk.

"Suffice to say they stumbled on a pet project of mine. A particularly valuable project."

"The existence of which you kept secret from them."

"Correct. Big money can be made from unusual finds these days."

Kirk regarded the pilot with guarded loathing. The scientist within him held little sympathy for Carne and his type - profiteers whose ham-fisted plundering of undiscovered planets had done much to retard the Federation's quest for knowledge throughout the Galaxy. He nodded towards the, until now, disregarded chunks of plastic on the table between them.

"And these, presumably, are something to do with it?"

Carne picked up the object nearest him. Kirk saw now that it was a cast of some kind of footprint, taken from the original impression in the ground. The material was some kind of epoxy resin, the type used to make minor repairs on board a spacer.

Something about the imprint struck a chord deep in Kirk's memory.

"Surely that looks like..."

"Exactly," interrupted Carne. "Shape and size exactly the same as the tracks found in the Himalayas on old Earth. Footprints of the Abominable Snowman!"

McCoy, until now regarding his new patient with a silent curiosity, suddenly spoke.

"A Yeti's footprint?"

"Yes. Even the depth of the impression gives it a weight close to that estimated for Earth's Yeti."

"And this was your secret project?"

"Hah! The others thought it was..." Carne's voice trailed off into silence, almost as if he had suddenly realised he was saying too much. Kirk sought out his eyes.

"What do you mean, the others thought...?"

He was interrupted by the insistent piping of the electronic bosun's whistle from the intra-ship communicator. Kirk touched a control on the table in front of him, and Spock's voice filled the briefing room.

"Captain. Routine sensor scans of the planet's surface indicate the presence of a non-sentient metallic object. Closer investigation suggests that it is a grounded, possibly crashed, scout ship."

"Hold on, Mr. Spock." Kirk turned to Carne. "Another ship, this far off the usual space lanes? Sounds too much of a coincidence to me, Mr. Carne. Is this your ship?"

"Could be, Captain. I never saw it crash, but on the other hand I didn't see the flare of its warp drive, either."

Kirk returned to the intercom.

"Mr. Spock, join me in the transporter room. Relay them the co-ordinates of the wreck. I want to take a look at it." He hit the 'off' switch. "Bones, Mr. Carne. If you will join us."

"As you say, Captain."

Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Carne and two security guards solidified before the twisted hulk of the spacer. Kirk ran a critical eye over it. The ship was more or less still in one piece, but even the most optimistic of observers would have to admit that it would never fly again.

The cause of the crash was not immediately apparent, despite the obviously crude maintenance - or rather lack of it - the ship had been subjected to.

"Your ship?" Kirk's question was more a statement.

"Correct." Even now, Carne was irritably unresponsive. Kirk nodded towards the torn-open outer airlock door.

"After you, Mr. Carne. It is still your ship."

"Oh, no, Captain Kirk. You are the Federation representative here, and as such are the one paid to take all the risks."

Doubly suspicious now, Kirk drew his phaser. Another had appeared in Spock's hand as McCoy aimed his tricorder at the hulk.

"No life forms registering, Jim. Only a few insects in the foliage beyond."

Kirk started for the ship. "Watch Carne, Bones. Spock, cover me."

He climbed into the airlock. The inner door, also open, led onto the small flight deck. Aft was another door leading, he assumed, to a storage area. The compact cabin was, surprisingly, relatively undamaged.

His boots skidded on something spilled across the gently sloping floor. He didn't need McCoy to tell him the gelling liquid, rust coloured in the pale light filtering through the open airlock and the viewing ports, was human blood.

He followed the trail. The body was still seated in the command

chair, and bore horrible wounds. Whatever had killed him had done a terribly thorough job.

Fighting the queasiness welling up in his stomach, Kirk, phaser at chest height, made his way to the aft chamber. The second body, bearing similar mutilations, was lying in the remains of a packing trunk that had, at one time in its life, held ration kits.

Feeling his control slipping, Kirk climbed from the wreck.

"What is it, Jim? You're as white as a sheet..."

"Two men, Bones. Both dead, in particularly gruesome circumstances." He breathed deeply as Carne spoke, trying to will the taint of the charnel house from him.

"My two partners. Ex partners, that is." Carne turned, a smile that chilled Kirk's blood on his face.

"You found an empty shipping container?"

"What of it?"

Carne chuckled, an evil chuckle that caused icy fingers to dance along McCoy's spine. "It looks as though they found what they were looking for."

"Explain yourself, mister." The discovery of the bodies had driven any shred of patience Kirk may have had for Carne from him.

"My discovery..."

"The Yeti's footprints?"

"Yes, Doctor McCoy. They knew all about the footprints. What they didn't know was that I had succeeded in capturing - alive - a real Yeti. It was in that container. One of them must have been curious and tried to open it..."

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Story by Gail Smith.

The planet to which they beamed down was pleasant enough. The greenery was sparse, but it was sufficient to break up the monotony of the pale grey rock, and it was scattered with tiny, straggling flowers in soft muted yellows and oranges with the occasional dusky pink. In the distance was the sound of running water, and the lilting cry of some animal.

This then was the planet Toyra, soon to be a member of the Federation. Already a badly needed medical team, led by an old friend of McCoy's, Dr. Karlin, was on its way to help the Toyreans build up their almost non-existent medical facilities.

At that moment, as promised, the welcoming committee arrived - if you could call two people a committee. Kirk recognised Embrin, leader of the Toyreans, from the visual contact they had made a short while ago. He was a slightly built, pale-skinned man of about twenty-eight. His companion was in his fifties, a stately, pompous looking man.

"Embrin, allow me to introduce my First Officer, Mr. Spock, ship's surgeon Dr. McCoy, Chief Engineer, Mr. Scott, and Lieutenant Bland."

Embrin lowered his head to each in turn, hand to forehead. The Enterprise party returned the gesture somewhat awkwardly.

"This is my Chief Advisor, Abron," said Embrin, indicating his companion, who gave the Toyrean bow stiffly.

At Embrin's invitation, they made their way to Marin, the capital city, which lay fast over a ridge, snug against a sheet of overhanging rock. The buildings were simple in design, short, square, flat-topped, built from the same grey stone, but each had a painted design of a different nature above its entrance. In fabulous colours, each had one thing in common. In the centre of an array of various animals and plants stood a large black bird with wide powerful wings and long

legs ending in huge five-toed feet. Toyreans were portrayed worshipping it. An obvious deity. At the door of the Toyrean leader's hall, where Embrin and his advisors dwelt, the design was fabulous. It showed Embrin dressed in some kind of ceremonial robes, a long-bladed weapon in his hand, protecting his cowering people from an array of ferocious-looking animals, with the same strange bird fighting at his side. As the two Toyreans reached the door, they bowed to the bird. Embrin turned to explain.

"As each leader inherits the hall, so the face on the design is altered. It shows that he will protect his people at all times."

"And - the bird?" questioned Kirk, hoping that he wasn't treading on dangerous religious ground.

"That, my dear Captain Kirk, is the legendary Amaru bird. It will come in times of great danger from the Aurin Mountains, to help us."

"This bird, you say, is a legend. Does anyone claim to have seen it?" asked Spock.

Embrin and Abron stiffened visibly. Kirk shot Spock a warning glance. Spock, who had no personal need for legends, seemed about to ruin a good friendship.

"Noone has seen the bird since the days of my grandfather, but it is there. Its footprints have been seen often," countered Embrin.

"Huge, deep, five-toed footprints in the mountains," added Abron.

"The Yeti's footprint strikes again," murmured Bland.

"Yes, Mr. Bland, I do see the similarity in the cases," agreed Spock.

"Yeti?" questioned Embrin.

"The Yeti, sir," explained Spock, "were believed by some people on Earth to have inhabited the Himalayan Mountains. The myth was entirely founded on footprints found in the snow, and occasional so-called sightings of an ape-like creature. It was never proved to exist."

"Then there is no similarity, Mr. Spock. Our Amaru bird exists. I suggest that we dine now, gentlemen."

Toyrean hospitality proved to be magnificent. Captain Kirk, however, was constantly on edge throughout the meal, hoping a certain subject would keep out of the conversation.

They had hardly finished discussing Toyrean membership of the Federation when Spock's curiosity urged him to ask if they could visit the Aurin Mountains.

"But of course, you are my guests," was the reply. "But forgive me if I do not join you; I have guests later. Abron will be a more competent guide."

As they followed Abron, Kirk strolled alongside Spock, Scott and McCoy, out of hearing of the Toyrean, who was a few yards ahead, deep in conversation with Bland.

"Spock, I hope you're not going to attempt to prove their bird to be non-existent," worried Kirk.

"Captain! I think that you could credit me with some tact at least. To completely destroy a harmless belief held so important by a total populace would not only damage their way of life, but also contradict our prime directive of non-interference."

"He means 'no'," smiled McCoy.

Kirk sighed with relief. He should have known that, but the way Spock had inquired about the bird had been unnerving.

"We're almost there, Captain."

The four men stopped to look where Abron pointed. Not two hundred yards to their left were three small peaks.

"Yon things?" muttered Scott to Kirk. "They're nothin' but pebbles, Captain. Why, in Scotland..."

"You're as bad as Chekov," grinned Kirk.

It was not long before they were a little way up the centre peak.

Abron allowed them to go no further, explaining that it was sacred ground. Spock worked his tricorder, McCoy his. Abron glanced at them doubtfully, then he was cornered by Scott, who was intent on describing the beauty of the Scottish mountains.

"The only life forms registering are various small animals and birds," stated McCoy.

"No Amaru birds round here, then," smiled Bland.

"Not here, or within a radius of..." Spock stopped abruptly.

"You found a Yeti, Sir?" grinned Bland.

McCoy glanced up. Spock was staring back towards Marin.

"What is it, Spock?"

Spock simply pointed. At the ridge where they had beamed down were four figures. McCoy couldn't see their faces, but even he could recognise Klingon uniforms at a distance.

"Jim!"

Captain Kirk had been joining in Scott's discussion with Abron. He looked up, sensing the urgency in McCoy's voice. He ran to where they stood, Scott and Abron behind him.

"Klingons! And they're with Embrin!" gasped Kirk.

"He told you he had guests, did he not?" said Abron, puzzled.

"But - Klingons! Does he know anything about them?"

"They arrived here two days ago, on the other side of the planet. This is their second visit to Marin itself. They are here for supplies and to make friends, to investigate our way of life..."

"Laddie, ye dinna make friends wi' a Klingon!" growled Scott.

"Snakes in the grass," muttered Bland.

"How many, Abron?"

"Twelve, altogether."

"Twelve, just to organise a food supply and make a report!" mocked McCoy. "They're up to something."

"Yes, Dr. McCoy, why take two days for a short operation such as that, and why the pretence of being friendly? Klingons normally just take what they want," agreed Spock.

"They mentioned ecological studies," proffered Abron.

"Fascinating. Klingons doing ecological studies? A Klingon ship leaves twelve men here and disappears out of sensor range," puzzled Spock.

James T. Kirk wanted an explanation, and fast. Mountains and cousins of Yeti forgotten, they sped back to Marin.

They burst in on a Klingon 'tete-a-tete' with Embrin in the leader's hall. Four Klingon heads turned as the five men in Federation uniform entered.

One Klingon rose to his feet with a gesture of mock pleasure.

"Why, Earthmen! Our old and trusted friends!" he said, with an attempted smile. "I am Krodol. What, may I ask, are you doing here, gentlemen?"

"I was about to ask you the same question," snapped Kirk.

"We're interested in -" began Krodol.

"The ecology, so we heard. Unusual for Klingons, I'd say," interrupted McCoy sarcastically.

"Now, gentlemen, why so suspicious of your dearest and most trusted friends?" leered Krodol. "Why not leave us to our work here, and -"

"We also have business here!" snapped Kirk angrily.

"Er...your races appear to be acquainted," said Embrin.

An incredible piece of detective work, thought Kirk sarcastically.

"If you'll excuse us, gentlemen," said Krodol, he and his men rising to leave. If he uses that word in that tone of voice just one more time, thought Kirk, I'll...then as the door closed behind the Klingons he wheeled on Embrin.

"Have you any idea what they're really like?"

"I don't understand you, Captain. You came speaking of friendship and peace, then treat my guests in such a way. Is this the friendship I have agreed to, the peace?" It was a surprising outburst from the normally tame and placid man.

Later, Kirk spoke to Spock. "Whatever the Klingons are up to, Embrin is up to his neck in it. That's obvious from the way he got his back up just now. He's hiding something. He's a weak man, Spock, and they've got some kind of hold over him."

"Captain!" Scott burst into the room.

"What is it, Scotty?"

"I ken whit they laddies are up tae!"

"What!!!"

"Take a look at these, Jim." It was McCoy who spoke as he entered the room just after Scott. He showed Kirk a clear cube about an inch square. Inside it was a glittering stone.

"What is it?"

"We were talking to one of the locals and I noticed this slung round his neck. I inquired about it, and he said it was a rare award given for great services to the planet. He also said that the Klingons had asked him the same thing. And he showed me what he showed them - he's let me borrow it for a while..." McCoy worked some kind of catch on the cube that let the stone fall on to the table. Within seconds it was on the floor, having burned a neat hole through the table. Quickly, McCoy used another piece of the clear stuff to flick the stone into its cube again. There was already a small hole in the stone floor. "This clear material is the only thing the stones cannot harm. It's found round the stones, which the locals call 'Kitrunes'."

"Fascinating!" exclaimed Spock, working his tricorder. "They simply do not register. A material completely unknown to us. Think what these Kitrunes could do, Captain, revolutionise -"

"And the Klingons are after them!" interrupted Kirk.

"Apparently," said McCoy. "The single location of these is known only to Embrin."

"Come on!" yelled Kirk, storming out of the room.

"Yes, Captain? More accusations against the Klingons?"

"No, Embrin. Against you."

"What?"

"We know about the Kitrunes."

Embrin was startled. "What have you been told? By whom?"

"We know the Klingons are after them, and since only you know the location of them, they're twisting your arm. Don't deny it, please."

"I..."

"We know, Embrin. Don't deny it. All we need to know now is if you've told them where the Kitrunes are. And what their hold over you is."

Embrin capitulated. "I told them not an hour ago that the Kitrunes lie in the catacombes tunnelling deep under the Aurin Mountains."

Kirk groaned. "Why, Embrin?"

"It...it all has to do with the Amaru bird."

"What? With your Yeti?...I mean, legend..."

"It isn't an old legend, Captain, it started when my grandfather reigned. He was a weak man, and disaster after disaster threatened his position. The people are very superstitious...they said some god was against him and would have deposed him. Then an even bigger trouble arose - another planet decided to invade us. Miraculously, they were suddenly blasted out of the sky before they could do much



damage. The people had no idea what had done it, so my grandfather decided to cash in on the miracle and save himself. He played on their superstitions and claimed that the gods had sent a huge bird to defend them. He claimed that it had come to him and that he had directed its actions. He even resorted to creeping out in the night to dig footprints, to prove his story. That's how desperate he was, and we've had to keep up the pretence since. He said it would return to our family in times of trouble. So he saved himself."

"And how do the Klingons fit into this?"

"They were the ones who really tackled the invaders, who had tried to stop them passing."

"And they threatened to tell your people this?" guessed Kirk.

"Yes."

"But they couldn't have known about the legend before. Why return now?"

"It was merely a stop for supplies - then they discovered the Kitrunes and came to force me to give away the source. It was only while we were arguing about it that Krodol shouted that their ancestors should never have saved this miserable little planet so long ago. I just couldn't help myself - I just gasped in realisation. ...And seeing I was scared, they...they forced me to tell them the story. They found it extremely amusing."

"Are they in the catacombes now?"

"No. They are meeting the other Klingons first, then I am to show them the way. The catacombes are many, and they do not trust me even though they know me to be a coward."

"How long before you join them?"

"Two hours."

"Show us the catacombes, Embrin, we'll -"

"But the Klingons! The bird!"

"We'll see to them, laddie," said Scott vehemently.

Kirk's communicator beeped. "Kirk here."

"Captain - Lt. Uhura here. A Klingon ship just came onto the scanners."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Usual procedure. Deflectors up, and if they make a move, fight back. Kirk out."

He turned to Embrin. "If the Klingons get those Kitrunes, they will be back for more. They'll probably claim this planet before the Federation could move to protect you."

"Never!"

"It's usual for them just to take what they want. Your planet would never break free from the Klingon hold. Under military rule, your people would be crushed. You would all be expendable!" shouted Kirk. "They live to steal, to murder, to conquer!"

"Might I add, sir, that it would be better to admit to the falsehood of the legend, even if it means relinquishing your position, than to allow the Klingons to destroy your way of life, and perhaps your people too," said Spock, summing it up completely.

"Yes, yes, I see...but my people believe in the Amaru, they depend on it to save them..."

"Can it save them from the Klingons? Or will you?"

Spock had made up Embrin's mind for him.

It was exactly two hour and seventeen minutes later when Embrin led ten of the Klingons into the catacombes. The Klingons did not know that Captain Kirk was fully aware of their plans - they had not expected Embrin to tell him, and their greed for the Kitrunes made them hurry after their guide, armed with flashlights and boxes made from the clear material to hold the stones. If they had known what else lay in wait for them, they would have been most surprised. Kirk's intention was to catch them in the act of stealing the Kitrunes, and with a charge of threats towards the Toyreans added on to those of theft, the Klingons would have been in deep trouble,

in accordance with the Organian Peace Treaty. Unfortunately, things didn't work out quite as planned.

As the Klingons neared the hollow where the Kitrunes glistened in the dark, the Enterprise party and eight Toyreans led by Abron - who wasn't really sure of what was going on, knowing only that the Klingons were now his enemies - were hidden in nearby passages which branched off in different directions. Bland moved forward a little, peering round the corner to see how close the Klingons were. His hand was against the wall, and the stone there was dry and powdery. It started to crumble. He managed to stop any fragments falling, but in the ensuing cloud of dust he felt himself beginning to choke. Redfaced with the effort, he tried to hold back the coughs, but suddenly, there were the Klingons, weapons raised in triumph.

"So, Embrin decided to bring a few friends along, did he? Well, he'll be sorry, I can tell you that!" snarled Krodol.

"I doubt it! Drop your weapons!"

The Klingons had dismissed Embrin as harmless once again, and he had jumped one of the Klingons from the back, grabbing his weapon. As the Klingons whirled in surprise, Kirk and the others took their chance and attacked from the rear. Toyrean fists knocked weapons wide, and phasers set on stun did the rest.

After the struggle, Abron had a broken arm. Bland lay dead. The Klingons were in some cases bruised and in others unconscious - apart from the stunning - but there was no serious damage on their side.

As the Enterprise party, along with Embrin and Abron, came to the surface, they found two Klingon guards the sullen prisoners of a group of strangers in Starfleet uniform.

"Karlin!" McCoy exclaimed. He turned to Kirk. "Jim, this is Dr. Karlin. We didn't expect you quite so soon," he added.

Kirk glanced at Embrin. "Your medical team," he explained, as he gripped Karlin's hand. "Talk about the cavalry arriving," he went on, grinning broadly. "Your transport must have made all the difference to the situation."

Karlin nodded. "Yes, the Klingons weren't at all eager to face up to two Federation vessels - even though ours was only a transport."

"We'll get them to lift off their men, then I don't think they'll need much persuasion to move off," Kirk decided.

Later, in the leaders' hall, Kirk spoke to Embrin. "Your secret is still safe, you know."

"No, Captain," he replied. "If I haven't the courage to rule without a legend to back me up, I shouldn't be ruling at all. I'll explain to my people about my grandfather's act, and let them judge me as they will. Let them appoint a new leader of their choice."

"Somehow, Embrin, I don't think it will come to that," Kirk said. "You had the courage to put your people before yourself in the end, and got rid of the biggest threat they've ever had - Klingon rule. You did better than any bird could ever have done."

Suddenly, Abron appeared. It was obvious that he had heard enough to guess the truth. He looked awkwardly at his feet, his features strained. Then he straightened up and gave Embrin the hand to forehead bow.

Kirk smiled. He had been right.

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Kirk: Bones, have you ever seen an Abominable Snowman?  
McCoy: Not yeti.

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Story by Helen Sneddon.

Micas 2 was a very pleasant place. The reports that had filtered back to the ship from the landing party had convinced Kirk that it would be worth while giving it a look; there were enough hostile planets around, a chance for a stroll on Paradise wasn't to be missed.

He spent the first minute after beamdown breathing in the warmly scented air, then another minute surveying the landscape before him. Without turning his head he could see just about every possible climatic variation - green lush grass, trees, lakes, interspersed with patches of rocky outcrops and desert scrubland, stretching in an undulating crazy patchwork to the forested foothills of the not too distant mountains, which sheered up almost vertically and disappeared into snow, ice and cloud.

Kirk snapped out of his daydream as Spock appeared, laden down with an assortment of survey gear.

"All packed up, Mr. Spock?"

"Yes, Captain, just a few more personnel to report back."

Kirk surveyed the landscape once more. "Strange to see desert so close to water, and the ice so near to all that temperate greenery."

"Extreme volcanic activity created the anomalies, Captain, forcing the mountains up to their precipitous heights, and pushing some of the underlying rock strata close to the surface to create the deserts. Our readings confirm this," he continued, warming to the subject, "and other tests conducted showed the development of some most interesting local phenomena, in particular a most curious..."

Readings, tests, phenomena...Kirk wasn't about to waste a few precious minutes listening to one of Spock's technical explanations.

"Animal life, Mr. Spock?" he interrupted.

"Animal life? Nothing of any great size, Captain, the largest would appear to be a species resembling a small goat."

Small? How small?"

"About 20 inches."

"Horns?"

"No, at least none of those we have seen have them. They are rather wary of our presence, but our findings indicate them to be very intelligent."

"Good, well, that settles it."

"Settles what, Captain?"

"I'm taking a walk." The arrival of McCoy and Scott with another returning survey group further persuaded him.

"Lovely place, Jim," beamed the doctor. "Pity you can't..."

"That's just where you're wrong, McCoy. That's exactly why I'm here. I don't see why I should moss out." He turned back to Spock. "Who's left?"

Spock checked the assembled group. "Ensign Chekov is the only one still to report. He is working on the far side of the lake." He took out his communicator. "I'll call him in."

Kirk stopped him. "Don't bother, Mr. Spock. You start moving all the equipment back to the ship and I'll find Mr. Chekov." And with that he took a deep breath of warm air and set off along the path to the lake.

Chekov had finished his survey and was on his way back to the landing area, but via another route, one which would take him away from the swamp and up into the rocky, ravine-ridden desert area. He had been five minutes into the sandy landscape when Kirk buzzed him to check on his whereabouts.

Feeling a little guilty about getting off his assigned route, he began a series of explanations, but Kirk cut him short. He understood, he felt the same. It wasn't often the pressures were eased and a chance could be found to do what one wanted to do, instead of what one was ordered to do.

"I'm heading for what looks like a deep gorge, Captain, just below a tall rock pillar formation."

Kirk scanned the rocky hillside rising a couple of hundred feet into the air about a mile away.

"I think I can see the pillar, Mr. Chekov, I'll head for that and meet you there. Kirk out."

Kirk altered his direction to intercept the ensign among the desolate hills off to his left.

The gorge was narrow, about forty feet wide at best, the walls rising almost vertically for a height of about a hundred feet, pitted with caves and ledges, the lowest some fourteen feet above ground level. Here and there along the length of the sandy floor were strewn strangely-shaped boulders of all sizes.

Chekov paused on the rocky entrance, the clattering of his feet, magnified by the gorge, echoing noisily along the length of the ravine. Here out of the sunshine it was cold, lifeless, eerie, unwelcoming, sinister. A slight shiver ran up his spine, but he shook it off and stepped purposefully forward onto the soft sand and into the shadow of the gorge.

His eyes shifted nervously about the high walls as he looked for signs of life, and his ears were alert for the slightest noise. Nothing moved, and all was still, but all that did nothing to dispel the cold clammy atmosphere which worsened the deeper he went into the gorge.

Coming to a halt about midway he casually dropped his eyes to the ground in front of him, and what he saw sent his blood racing uncontrollably through his body, setting every nerve on edge. A footprint.

Childhood tales of terror began to pour into his mind and his spine began to quiver helplessly. He inched closer, not daring to believe his eyes, then instinctively scrambled back as his worst fears were confirmed. It was exactly as Great Uncle Boris had described it. Great Uncle Boris had seen it, and lived to tell the tale. Now Great Nephew Pavel had seen it, but would he live to...

His heart turned to ice and he scurried for the shelter of the nearest rocks, fumbling clumsily at his communicator as he did so, trying to get some measure of control into his shattered nerve centre.

"C-C-Captain K-K-Kirk!"

Kirk was instantly on the alert, there could be no mistaking the fear in the Ensign's voice. Something was definitely wrong.

"What is it, Chekov?"

"Captain," he almost screamed in panic mixed with relief at having made contact. "I found a...f-footprint."

"Footprint? What kind of footprint?"

"A...big one."

"How big?"

"Very big."

"Human?"

"No...I don't think so..."

"Where are you?"

"In that gorge."

Kirk's eyes urgently scanned the rocky outcrops. Rocks, rocks and more rocks. "Keep your communicator open and I'll find you," he instructed, and broke into a fast run in the direction of the signal.

Kirk reached the entrance to the gorge ten minutes later, pausing momentarily as the sound of his echoing feet surprised him. He ran on into the gorge itself, phaser drawn, and gradually came to a halt.

He looked cautiously around him, struck by the same chilling eeriness that had so affected Chekov. The steep cave-riddled walls stared back at him soundlessly, blankly. Nothing stirred in the valley, no movement, no sound...no Ensign. Of Mr. Chekov, there was no sign.

Kirk checked his communicator. This was the right gorge, the signal confirmed it.

"Chekov?" What am I whispering for, he thought. "Chekov!" he called, but the only answer he received came chillingly from behind him - an insidious, scraping, clawing sound that set every nerve on edge. Steeling himself for whatever it might be he turned slowly round. Chekov grinned apologetically from behind a comfortably large boulder.

"Ah...hello, Captain."

"Chekov! What do you think you're doing?" But he could understand something of the young lad's fear - hadn't he himself felt just a tinge of apprehension? It was the gorge that did it - the silence, the echo, the mysterious, clammy...

"Where's this footprint?"

Chekov, fortified by the Captain's presence, pointed it out.

"You passed it, back there." He hurried over to the spot and dropped on one knee. "Here it is."

Kirk joined him and studied the impression closely. It most certainly was not human. It had a span of about fifteen inches, and the indentations in the sand indicated three toes, each with a long claw or talon on the end which had dug deep into the unresisting earth.

For a few minutes they studied it in silence. There was definitely something unreal about it - what kind of a creature would leave a mark like that? Kirk glanced about him suddenly; a feeling they were not alone, that they were being watched by someone...or something, would not let him be.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Chekov?"

"I think...I know what it is..."

Kirk looked at his fear stricken face. "You do?"

"Yes, sir. Great Uncle Boris said that..."

"Who?"

"Great Uncle Boris. He had a hunting lodge in the Himalayas. He told me about it."

"About what?"

Chekov pointed at the footprint. "That."

"What about it?"

"It's...it's the footprint."

"I know it's the footprint."

"No...it's the footprint. It's footprint."

Too much space was warping the lad's mind, thought Kirk.

"What's footprint?" he asked patiently.

"The...Yeti," Chekov almost whispered.

"The...what?"

"The Yeti."

Kirk delved into the furthest reaches of his memory. Yeti? Yeti? He'd heard of that...Of course! - the Abominable Snowman!

"But that's just a legend, a myth. It doesn't exist."

Chekov bristled. "Great Uncle Boris saw it, and lived to tell the tale." Kirk sighed. The only thing that was going to convince Chekov would be a hard fact or two.

"But the Himalayas...snow, ice," he said, indicating the gorge. "This is a desert valley."

"The snow line is only a few miles away," Chekov corrected.

"The Yeti will travel hundreds of miles in its search for..." he swallowed, "...food."

This was beginning to get a little out of hand. There was no place in mature civilised Starship personnel for such meanderings, Kirk decided. But there was the footprint, and this was an alien net. But there had been nothing in Spock's report...nothing that sensors had picked up, at any rate.

Kirk found himself recalling legends of his own homeland, in particular one about a great Bear Man rumoured to haunt the forested foothills of...was it the Rockies? The Appalachians? There were forests at the foot of the Micas mountains, weren't there? Nearer than Chekov's Yeti...A Bear Man, fourteen feet tall, six feet wide, hands that could tear trees apart, feet big enough to...to... - he glanced down - ...to leave a footprint just like this one...

He shook himself. Now he was getting as bad as Chekov. There were no such things as...

His thoughts, and Chekov's, were frighteningly interrupted by the sounds of some unknown animal scraping on the stone entrance at the far end of the gorge. From the amount of noise that reached their ears it was no midget, and from the volume of unholy vocal sound that began to course along the valley towards them, it was no friend. It began as a low deep moan, rose undulatingly and horrifyingly in pitch and volume until they felt their blood would freeze, then slowly and gradually subsided into silence.

Kirk was amazed to discover both he and Chekov had pressed themselves instinctively against the gorge wall for safety. He pushed himself sharply off it and tried to pull his shattered nerves together.

"Such creatures just do not exist," he stressed, as much for his own peace of mind as for Chekov's. Chekov nodded furiously.

"They don't, Mr. Chekov," Kirk insisted. Chekov continued to nod furiously. The noise from the entrance rose again, moaning, wailing, terrifying...

"On the other hand," continued Kirk, "it would do no harm to have another opinion." Chekov's head looked in danger of being shaken clean off his shoulders. Kirk pulled out his communicator.

"Kirk to landing party."

"McCoy here."

Kirk heaved a sigh of relief and offered up a prayer. At least it had been Bones who had answered. What Spock would have had to say if he once got an inkling of the mad ideas running through their minds didn't bear thinking about.

"Bones, are you busy?" he asked casually.

"Nope. Spock's managing to get all the equipment taken back. Scotty and I are just lazing around waiting for you two to arrive. Where are you anyway?"

"In a rocky gorge about a mile west of the lake. There's something here we'd like your opinion of?"

"Is it anywhere near that big pillar?"

"Yeah, just at the base of it."

"Okay, we're on our way, we'll be along shortly."

Kirk put his communicator away. Play it cool, keep the head, no sense in panicking everyone, it might be nothing at all...

Despite his instructions to himself the next twenty minutes seemed interminable.

"What do you think of it, Bones?" They were all four clustered round the indentation in the sand.

"Weirdest thing I ever saw."

"Scotty? Any opinions?"

"Aye," the Engineer replied with great feeling.

"What?"

"It's just as he described it."

"What is? And who did?"

"Grandfather Angus. It's it a' right."

"What is?"

"That is. The beastie's footprint."

"Beastie?"

"Nessie," Scott said with deepest reverence.

Kirk couldn't believe his ears. "Nessie? You mean that antiquated lump of tourism you Scots keep dredging up whenever the economy flags?"

"Nessie exists!" Scott demanded indignantly. Kirk tried the same strategy he'd used on Chekov.

"Your Loch Ness Monster lives in water," he explained. "This is a desert valley."

"Yon loch is only a mile away. Nessie's been known tae travel great distances in search of food." He was as bad as Chekov.

"As far as the Himalayas?"

"Whit?"

"Chekov thinks it's a Yeti."

"Yeti? Huh! Bogey men! Nessie's real."

"The Yeti exists!" Chekov countered defensively.

"Look, son, your Yeti's as real as the kick in your vodka. We Scots have real booze and real monsters."

"It's a Yeti."

"It's Nessie."

The argument continued between them. Kirk turned to McCoy and said quietly, "Any chance of it being made by a big Bear Man, about fourteen feet tall...?"

McCoy looked at him in disbelief.

"Well, if everyone's putting up ideas, I've got one to make."

"What?"

McCoy licked his lips and rolled his eyes. "The Great Black Slime Reptile of the Scarlet Swamp."

All three looked at him. "Never heard of it."

"It's a great, black, slimy lizard that lives in the swamp back home," he elaborated. "When the moon's full it slides out backwards and tramples people to death."

"You're making it up."

"Well, aren't you?"

"Nessie is real, and that's her footprint! Or one like her..." Scott qualified. "The real Nessie's still in Scotland, of course..."

"It's a Yeti footprint. I know it. It's exactly as Great Uncle..."

"Its skin is all black and lumpy, and it oozes this hideous, foul, treacly slime. My grandpappy..."

"Gentlemen!" The argument abated as Kirk's voice brought them back to the matter in hand. "What is real is this footprint. Agreed?" They all agreed. "And some animal made it. Agreed?"

"Nessie."

"The Yeti."

"The Great Black Slime..."

"And that noise was real."

McCoy looked at Scott, and both looked at Kirk. "What noise?"

"We heard a noise..." He broke off and turned sharply in the direction of the end of the gorge. The hair on the backs of four necks rose as the scraping, slithering noise came again, closely followed by the same weird, ethereal, insidious, undulating moaning. When the last nerve shattering sound had vanished a white faced McCoy found his voice.

"What in hell was that?"

"It's the call o' the Monster," breathed Scott.

"Uncle Boris..." Chekov was near to panic. Kirk dealt with the situation firmly. "Mr. Chekov, there is no need for panic. We must examine the available evidence, assess the situation fully, come to

a logical conclusion, and then..."

"Then?"

He shrugged. "Then we panic." He grinned, Chekov grinned, the tension eased. The four men clustered round the footprint once more.

"Well, Bones?"

"Well, what?"

"Analysis."

"How can I analyse a footprint?"

"You must be able to say something."

McCoy looked at him sceptically then aimed his scanner at the sand.

"What do you read?"

"Air."

"Air?"

"Well, a footprint isn't anything, is it, it's just a lot of air surrounded by sand!"

"All right, all right. What can we tell by the shape?"

"It's more than a foot wide, three toes with claws on the end... one or two other bits in the middle, probably pads of flesh."

"Could it be a paw?" Kirk asked hopefully.

"I don't think so." Kirk felt a touch of dejection as his Bear Man theory took a tumble. "The toes are longer and thinner, but it's hard to say, we're dealing with alien life here, remember."

Kirk studied the impression for a few seconds more then his brow furrowed. "How tall would you say it was?"

"From the size of that print, about fifteen feet at least."

"Standing erect?"

"Yes."

"On its one leg?"

"One leg?"

"We've...ah...only got one footprint." He got wearily to his feet. "Mr. Chekov, Mr. Scott, see if you can find any more. That is if we haven't obliterated them all already."

"Here's another!" Chekov called. It was only about eight feet away among some low rocks.

"And one here!" called Scott from the far side of the gorge.

No more were found, just the three. They gathered by the first footprint to discuss their findings.

"So what do we have? Suggestions?"

"A creature with three legs?"

"A biped with an eight foot stride."

"It could be a one-legged creature...that hops."

"Or a quadruped with a wooden leg."

"McCoy..."

"There could be more than one, Captain. It could be three one-legged creatures."

"Or a biped, and another biped...with a wooden leg."

"Gentlemen, there is one other important factor we have missed. There are only three footprints, none of which is near the entrance to the gorge. How did this creature get in without leaving tracks at either end?"

Realisation slowly dawned on the men as to this fact.

"You realise what this means?"

"Aye, it must have wings."

As neither the Yeti, the Loch Ness Monster, the Bear Man nor even the Great Black Slime Reptile of the Scarlet Swamp had been famed for their wings the next few seconds passed in silence. Then Kirk felt his nerve-ends receive another twisting, this time from the other end of the gorge.

"Ssssh! What's that?"

The slithering, scraping noise was starting again, only this



time it was different. Louder, nearer... then it stopped abruptly.

"It's coming in!" Chekov panicked.

Why is it it's always the Captain who has to take the lead, Kirk wondered momentarily as he found himself involuntarily at the front of the group. Then his thoughts were concentrated on preparing to meet whatever was coming into the gorge. Tensed, ready, prepared for anything...anything except...a Starship uniform? Spock? Spock!

"Spock!" he exclaimed, relieved, as the familiar Starship blue hove into sight at the end of the gorge. The Vulcan paused as he caught sight of the huddled group by the large boulder, then continued on along the sand to meet them.

"Captain, I was..."

"Ssssh!"

Spock lifted one eyebrow at the remark and dutifully fell silent. Kirk beckoned him over to the footprint.

"We found this footprint. What do you think?"

"It's...interesting."

"Interesting?" challenged McCoy. "Is that all you can say about it?" Spock gave the Doctor one of his long-suffering looks and got down on one knee beside the footprint.

"You found this impression?"

"Yes. You said there was no life of any size here, Spock, but something made that."

"And what ever made it," said Chekov, "is lying in wait for us at the end of the gorge."

"Have you formed any opinions as to what it could be?"

Kirk looked uncomfortably around. "Welll" He wasn't getting any help from the rest of the group. For the first time since they'd got there they were quite reluctant to talk. "Well...we threw out a few ideas, but nothing concrete..."

"Hmmm." He studied the footprint. "It does appear to have three toe-like projections, each with a distinct projecting spur on the end, and a rounder central portion here..."

Interest revived in the watching group. "It does?"

"Yes."

"About how tall would you estimate?" Kirk asked eagerly.

"Three feet three inches."

"What? Is that all?"

"Yes, far too small to be your Bear Man, Mr. Chekov's Yeti, Mr. Scott's Loch Ness Monster, or even..." he cast a withering glance in the direction of McCoy, "...the Great Black Slime Reptile of the Scarlet Swamp."

A stunned silence descended on the group.

"How...how did you...?"

Spock stood up. "The same way I knew how to locate you." He moved over to the large boulder and picked up an object from the sand at it's base. "Mr. Chekov's communicator."

Three pairs of eyes turned slowly in the Ensign's direction.

"Has that been open since I got here?" queried Kirk, in not too friendly a manner.

"Well, I suppose...I mean, I must have forgotten...I..."

"When I went to call you," continued Spock, "I discovered I was already in contact. It has been a most entertaining journey here," he added, supressing a smirk, but not quite far enough to escape McCoy's eagle gaze.

"You're so damn smart, I suppose you know what made that footprint!"

"Certainly. A species known as Pes Tripodis."

"Pes what?"

"Pes Tripodis, or translated, the foot of a tripod, specifically Starfleet regulation support tripod mark two. If you will recall the

configuration of the base you will no doubt remember that it has three projecting feet each with an elongation on the end for stability..."

"All right, all right, all right."

"And I doubt very much if it's lying in wait for you at the end of the canyon, since I returned it to the ship some time ago."

"I take it you were surveying in this gorge?"

"Yes, Captain. Didn't you notice our footprints?"

"Mr. Chekov!" It just wasn't the Ensign's day. "Did you not notice any footprints other than this one?"

"No, sir, I mean, I saw this one, and I thought..."

Kirk sighed. "And by the time we were all through tramping up and down we wouldn't be able to tell yours from ours."

"But what about that scraping and howling?" asked McCoy. "Or was that you too?"

"Yes, very interesting. It came over the communicator. One moment." He walked up the canyon in the direction of the noise and disappeared.

He was back in a few minutes. "Very interesting."

"What's up there?"

"Nothing. At least nothing more than a Micas goat. I think you'll find that's the cause of the occurrences."

"Goat? One little goat? How could..."

"The echo, Captain."

"Echo?"

"The Phenomenon we were investigating. I tried to tell you about it earlier, but you were in a hurry to be elsewhere. The echo is only triggered from within a specific area at either end of the gorge. Here in the middle it is non-existent, as we discovered from our survey tests."

"One stupid little goat?"

"On the contrary, as I also explained earlier, a very intelligent goat."

"Explain."

"For the past hour or so the goat has been trying to reach its cave, probably one of those off that ledge above your heads. It is naturally wary of humans, and it has found a whole collection of them sitting on its front doorstep. It has utilised the natural resources to try to...scare you off. By standing at the entrance to the gorge, its natural call has been distorted and amplified by..."

"I don't believe it."

"As you will, but I think you will find that to be the case." He indicated the gorge entrance. "I think it is time we were heading back to the ship," he said and set off. The others watched him go, then dejectedly began following him.

When they reached the end of the gorge they stopped and looked back, just in time to see a little goat-like creature trot in from the far end, leap lightly onto the large boulder, and from there onto the ledge and into one of the caves.

All four turned and headed back to the beamdown point in silence. None of the four were keen to engage the Vulcan in conversation, not after the fools they'd made of themselves. All except McCoy, of course. After a few minutes silent walking he spoke to Kirk, but in a voice loud enough for Spock to hear.

"Of course, only we primitive humans would think up such ridiculous myths and legends. The Vulcans wouldn't dream of having anything as illogical as Yetis and Loch Ness Monsters, would they?"

"On the contrary, Doctor, we do."

"You do? Well, well, well!" The Doctor rubbed his hands in glee. "We've had things from the swamp, the lake, the forest, the snowfield. Doesn't leave you much, Spock. What's it going to be?"

"Ah...the Desert Demon."

"The...what?"

"The Desert Demon. Said to haunt the great Shirakan Desert. Whole caravans of travellers have disappeared whenever the Demon chose to strike. Reports of the being's shape are many and varied, but what does remain constant is its method of attack. It spreads itself..."

McCoy looked at Kirk. "He's making it up."

"Didn't you?"

"Me? Of course not! Have I got to suffer...?"

"...like a great gelatinous net over the sand, not unlike your spider spinning a web to catch the unwary insect, then causes the surrounding sand to swirl over it as camouflage. And all without the aid of a full moon."

"Jim, stop him!"

"You stop him, you started him!"

"It lies in wait for the unsuspecting traveller, who does not realise what lies underfoot..."

"It's twenty minutes back to the beamdown point!"

"...victim, who realises to his cost that it is too late."

"I can't stand it!"

"Great Uncle Serrian....."

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Story by Valerie McLean.

The enormous footprint stared back at them out of the dried mud.

"What is it?" Scott asked.

"A Yeti's footprint," said McCoy.

"A what?"

"Abominable Snowman."

"I hope we don't meet it."

"We shouldn't. There isn't any snow."

Scott looked at the Doctor as if he thought his leg were being pulled, and decided to get onto safe ground.

"Where's the rest of the landing party? We should look into this."

McCoy looked around. They appeared to have lost sight of the others. But he was not too worried.

"They won't be far away."

Each person had been told to investigate the area with particular reference to his own speciality. For Dr. McCoy this meant medicine and people. The footprint, in spite of its size, looked vaguely human. He followed the direction the creature must have taken, and found part of another print further away from the river. The sensors on the ship had shown no signs of life in this area, but the footprints did not look too old, the edges were still very clear cut. He wondered if someone had marked them out as a joke. This kind of thing had been done on another occasion, but the culprit had been severely reprimanded by the Captain.

The ground here was quite rocky and hilly. McCoy looked back. Scott was walking back to look for the rest of the landing party. McCoy hesitated, then took out his communicator.

"McCoy to Enterprise. Is the Captain there?"

"Kirk here. go ahead, Bones."

"I've found something, it looks like an enormous footprint, but I could be wrong. Could you have a sensor check made for life forms please."

"Sure. Stay put. If there's anything there, I'll send some more men down. Kirk out."

McCoy folded the communicator's aerial, and stood, surveying the area, looking for clues, idly fingering the communicator.

As he turned he saw it. Three times the height of himself, it looked like a polar bear, with pale gold fur. Moving very slowly he raised the communicator, and started to open the aerial. A long arm struck out and knocked him flying, the communicator jolted from his grasp.

The creature took two steps and rested a heavy paw on him, while it studied him. He forced himself to lie still and hoped it would lose interest. Through half closed eyes he saw the second forepaw reach out, and felt the strong, rudimentary fingers closing round him. Then he was picked up and held close to the enquiring eyes. The grip was strong and he did not dare move. The big nose snuffled and blew all over him and he nearly suffocated from the stench of the breath. Then he was held tightly to the big furry chest and the creature loped off. His face was pressed tightly to the fur. He struggled for breath, trying not to move. One arm was bent painfully backwards. There were bruises or cuts, he could not tell which, on his elbow and the back of his shoulder where he had been knocked flying.

Out of the corner of one eye he could see that they were travelling very quickly, and were soon going uphill where a search party would never find him. But the life detecting sensors on the Enterprise might yet pick him out.

They must have been travelling for about ten minutes when they went suddenly into the pitch darkness of a cave, and the animal slowed down as it felt its way along the walls, although it seemed to know the layout of the cave.

A little dim light appeared and McCoy saw that they were in a bigger cave that had a thin crack in the roof. There were more of the creatures here. They came forward to investigate the human creature that was put on the ground in front of them. They poked and prodded it and snuffled it all over.

He lay absolutely still, going on the principle that a wild animal will lose interest if its prey appears lifeless, unless it becomes hungry. At least, he hoped that was true.

He was right. After a while they wandered away and left him. When none of them were looking, he got up and ran into the dark cave, from which they had entered the main one.

There was a great echoing roar from behind, and two of the creatures followed at a four legged run. They had an advantage. They knew the cave. He found a crack, part of the way along, and pressed himself into it, holding his breath.

He heard the creatures go loping past. He came out and followed the sound of them. They made so much noise they did not hear him. He followed quickly, and a little dim light lit up the cave. He drew his phaser, set on the setting beyond stun and went forward cautiously. The second setting could kill a man. He wondered what it would do to those monsters.

They were at the entrance, snuffling round and one of them spotted him. He fired. The creature roared, reared up on its hind legs, blotting out all the light, then, slowly, it fell. The second one turned, stared and snarled, low, at the back of its throat.

"Sorry, old fella," McCoy muttered, and fired again.

It swung its head slowly from side to side. Then it too fell heavily. He ran out past them. Then he stopped. Very quickly he took a pair of scissors from his medikit and cut off a little of one of the animals' fur, which he put in the pouch along with the scissors.

Then he started to run down the slope. The cave was several miles from the landing party, and the creatures might recover quickly, but with a bit of luck a sensor sweep would find him.

He had been gone only five minutes, in which time he had managed to turn his ankle once, when he heard sounds of pursuit. He did not want to do it, but he knew he would have to phaser the creature again. The ground was pretty rocky here, with small, lumpy hills in between larger hills. He stopped and waited, among the rocks, looking back for his pursuer. Then one of them appeared, saw him and stopped. It snarled as he walked towards it to get better firing range. Then it rushed towards him. He fired. It continued to run, then slowed and collapsed.

The second one was nowhere in sight. Then suddenly a great shadow fell over him. He looked upwards. The second creature had launched itself off some higher ground. He fired instinctively, realised his mistake and started to run too late. The unconscious creature fell on him, knocked him to the ground, pinning him there, with only his head and left arm free. The sudden shock, concussion, and growing pain from cracked collar bone and ribs made unconsciousness come very close. He fought against it, at the same time trying to breathe against the great weight on his chest. He felt darkness and heaviness become part of his existence, and as it faded he felt some thing prodding at his left arm. It was the other creature and he knew he had lost.

It clawed at his arm and head as it tried to get him out from under its companion. Then it gripped his arm with its stubby fingers and pulled. It was like being torn on the rack. He screamed. The noise made the creature let go and back off.

He realised that the tug had almost freed his right arm. But it was his right collar bone that was broken, and any further effort produced only pain. The creature was coming back at him. With sudden panic and strength born of fear he reached round with his left hand, gripped his right hand, and pulled it free. Gripping the phaser with both hands he fired it at the creature. It swayed and fell slowly.

Still with the surge of unnatural strength, he pulled against the weight of the animal on top of him. Sometimes the pain in his ribs robbed him of all strength but finally he was coming free easily, and standing up. His legs were not badly hurt and he walked unsteadily away from the mountainous furry creature, careful to put his phaser back in its holster before it fell from his weakened hands.

His left arm and the left side of his head were bleeding from the claw marks. He knew he could not make the whole of the journey back without rest and he kept glancing back. Even now he was reluctant to put the phaser onto a more powerful setting. His instincts rebelled at the destruction of life in any form and for any reason.

Pain weakened him, but he plodded onwards, heavily, putting one foot in front of the other. The landscape opened out a bit more, and he saw up ahead the movement of a shuttlecraft flying low and slow. He stood still, and gingerly raised his left arm to wave it. But the craft flew out of sight behind some hills.

Behind him he heard the creatures again, still pursuing. He felt he could not go on any more. He stumbled a few steps and fell full length, the sudden jolt agonising every pain in his body. The sounds behind became clearer. He reached with his left hand for the phaser, rolled over, to see the creatures. They came to within a hundred yards and stopped. Then they split up and started to move to either side.

He fired at one and the other raced in towards him. He fired at that one and it fell a few yards away. He could not will his body up, all he wanted to so was rest, and let go. But out of the recesses of his subconscious an order was given and he pulled his knees up to where he could push himself up onto them and drag himself upright. The phaser dropped to the ground unnoticed.

Three parts unconscious he stumbled on, his glazed eyes fixed on

a point somewhere ahead. Something dark and heavy moved a short distance in front of him and he started to look for his phaser. The shadow became still and a few moments later he heard voices. His eyes focussed slowly and he saw that the shadow was a shuttlecraft that had landed, and men were running towards him, one of them Captain Kirk.

"Bones, are you all right?"

"Damn silly question," he managed.

Kirk grinned briefly as he saw the blood on McCoy's arm and head.

"Yes, I suppose it was. Come back in the shuttle. Nurse Chapel's there. She'll see to you."

"There are two enormous creatures back there. We'll have to leave."

"How big are they?"

"Three times the height....."

He started to reach upwards but as he tilted his head upwards he realised his mistake, but too late, and he lost his balance. Kirk partly broke his fall. As he knelt by the semi-conscious Doctor, he glanced up and saw one of the enormous creatures towering up on its hind legs.

"Everyone back into the shuttle! Take off immediately!"

He heaved McCoy onto his shoulder and stumbled back to the shuttlecraft. The others helped to drag him in, the door was shutting and they were taking off straight up, even before he could get up from the floor.

The rest was uneventful. The shuttlecraft got back to the ship, and McCoy was taken to sickbay on a stretcher where he received excellent treatment.

When he was well enough to receive visitors he gave the piece of animal fur to Sulu, who was interested in such things, and learned that pictures, still and moving, had been taken by fully equipped landing parties, since his adventure. But no one else had a sample to work from.

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Story by Elizabeth Sharp.

The sun shone on an all but dead world. Its pale, yellow rays flickered across the white, petrified forest, and stretched onward into the empty wilderness beyond. Death and desolation had marked this planet for their own, the results of their labour plain to see. It was not for sorrow at the death of his people that had driven Bork to his new height of insanity. Not for the waste of a thousand million years did he curse the stars. Not out of any sense of shame or grief at the total destruction of his race did he pace the once proud rain forest, night after night. But because they had left him, because he was the last one alive, because he had endured the pain and horror for no glory, Bork cried his hatred at the Universe. Alone in his torment, the large apeman had scurried deep into the forest, far from the sight and smell of the decaying remains of his people.

He had lived that way for five centuries, in total seclusion. Then the new creatures had appeared. They were small and revolting, but Bork had studied them. On occasions he had even wandered into their minds, probing their thoughts. But they had gone and once more he was alone.

He sniffed at the breeze, his huge paws striking at air as the sulphur smell reached him. The wind was getting stronger, rustling the bare branches above his head and he realised he had very little time left. But as desperation and loneliness threatened to crush

him, his telepathic sense came to his rescue. Bork crouched, his gaze held upwards at the sky, staring into the coming dawn. He growled, once, ever so softly, as the tiny light followed a perfect arc in the sky from East to West, then vanished into darkness. The humans had come again and this time he would strike.

Slowly the lines of his body altered till they disappeared into the golden, translucent cloud that Bork had become. The cloud vanished in the light of the rising sun.

The leaf slowly turned towards the golden sunlight. With its slim line and stem and deep green, it was all but perfection. Only, at the very tip a little bit of brown had crept in, curling the edges ever so slightly. Nature would do her best to shine till the brown crept to the middle, bringing death with it. Still, the tiny speck of green had pride of place now.

It was the only leaf left alive. It fluttered in the breeze as the sun sent grey shadows dancing across the barren, desolate landscape.

Spock stood near the edge of the cliff. Far below the land stretched endlessly to the horizon, till it met the jagged, rugged cliffs that clawed the alien sky.

The Vulcan felt his clothing being plucked by the wind. The icy breeze was becoming a gale and the distant howl took possession of the atmosphere. A movement caught Spock's attention. The leaf fluttered, then fell from the white branch to the dry ground next to his feet. The gale had been too much of a battle and the leaf was sent scurrying along the ground, to the brink of the cliff - and over it.

The wind blew in his face, bringing the smell of sulphur with it. Spock saw, in the distance, a fountain of fire being expelled with violent fury from the confines of the planet's core. Energies that could no longer be contained burst from the distant volcanoes, sending a stream of lava to create a fiery, moving landscape.

In that violent, empty place where fire was becoming the dominant element, it would take a man of extraordinary sensitivity to find anything of beauty. But such a man stood on the edge of the sheer rock. Spock was a Vulcan and a scientist, and the constant movement, the rising sound and the display of nature's forces at work formed beauty in his eyes.

The gale brought a new sound to his ears - the sound of voices. He turned away from the precipice, and walked towards the hidden grove in the direction of the voices. He walked round the ruins of an ancient stone building and found the group standing on the other side. Captain Kirk nodded in acknowledgement as he came to join them.

"Seen anything, Mr. Spock?" Spock shook his head.

"No, Captain, I've seen no indication of any life form and tricorder readings concur with earlier ones taken by previous expeditions to this planet. The world is dead except for the simplest of life in plant form."

John Thomson made a business of clearing his throat. He was a short, well built man with dark hair and pale grey eyes that seemed to be perpetually frowning. Thomson was a scientist - not a very distinguished one, but he was the leader of a group of six other scientists, four men and two women, who had come to study the planet Krail for six months. They were all here now, standing in a semi-circle facing Kirk, Spock, Dr. McCoy and Lt. Sulu, the Enterprise having just brought them to Krail. Thomson didn't like Spock and he had gone out of his way the past six days to make his feelings well known, not only to the Vulcan but to everyone else on board. In return, Kirk detested him and was only too glad that after six days they were at last "Getting shot of the little newt." Thomson's voice dripped with contempt as he addressed Spock.

"Excuse me, Commander, but if this planet is totally devoid of life as you say, what made these footprints which, I may add, have been made during the last five hours?"

Spock glanced down to where Thompson pointed. The tiny grove collected water and on the ground in the muddy patch that Thompson had indicated, several large impressions were clustered. They were footprints, but by their size and shape they obviously belonged to some large apelike animal, resembling as much as anything the fictitious Yeti's.

Spock looked back at Thompson. "I accept that these prints exist and my tricorder readings confirm the time they were made. However, I can find no indication of the life form that made them. This phenomenon has been known for a long time; indeed, this is the reason you have come to Krail - to investigate the footprints."

"That's quite right, Mr. Thompson," Kirk added. "If Mr. Spock knew what had made the footprints, it would hardly be worth your while coming here."

"Quite so, Captain," replied Thompson, "but I have an excellent scientific qualification. I'll find out."

Kirk was on the verge of telling Thompson exactly where he could put his qualification when Spock excused himself and left. The stone ruins behind him had aroused his curiosity and he wanted to take tricorder readings before Kirk ordered the landing party to beam up. The building had obviously been a large one, but only two sides of the construction remained - the North and East walls. The other two walls had gone, as had the roof. All of the interior had gone, except for a small stone or altar that stood against the North wall. Spock pushed the button on the tricorder and noted the readings with interest. The building proved to have been erected just over nine hundred Earth years previously. It had been damaged for five centuries and had thus stood longer as a ruin than as a complete building. Spock looked up from his study to find Kirk standing beside him.

"Anything unusual, Spock?"

"No, sir. It would seem that this building was erected by a primitive race. There have been other ruins found elsewhere on Krail, but this is the most complete building still in existence. It is only round this ruin that the clew-like footprints have been observed."

Kirk nodded and looked round at the bare interior. As he did so, he missed the start of what was to become one of the most horrifying experiences of his life.

It was like a burst of sunlight, and Spock's eyes darted to the light's source, at the very tip of the North wall. For a brief fraction of a second the Vulcan's eyes were dazzled by the light and his head swam with a distant, obscure sound. He felt a sensation, like a heart beat, engulfing him - and then it was gone. He decided not to mention it since he felt perfectly normal again and even began to wonder if it had happened at all.

If Kirk had been watching his First Officer, he would have been in no doubt as to the reality of his friend's experience. It would have been impossible to miss the look of total blankness that flashed across Spock's usually alert face. But the Captain's eyes had been elsewhere for the brief few seconds it takes to scan two stone walls. His eyes returned to the Vulcan as Spock switched off the tricorder.

"Very well, Spock, I doubt if we can learn anything else here. We'll beam back up to the ship and send down Thompson's supplies. Then we can leave the 'little genius' to his mysterious footprints." Spock nodded and followed his Captain outside to join McCoy and Sulu. Kirk took out his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise."



"Scott here, Captain."

"The landing party is ready to beam up, Mr. Scott." Kirk lowered the communicator and glanced ahead of him. "Goodbye, Mr. Thompson, ladies, gentlemen. I wish you every success in your investigations. O.K., Scotty, energise."

The landing party vanished in the sparkle of the transporter beam. Gradually their surroundings solidified into the interior of the transporter room. It was here that Spock got the first of many shocks.

Part of him, it seemed, was seeing the transporter room for the first time. A feeling of strangeness came over the Vulcan as the reality of the experience struck him. A terrible loneliness surrounded him, only to vanish as suddenly as it had come. Now Spock felt compelled to tell Kirk, even if the Captain thought he was insane. He opened his mouth to speak, only to close it again as no words came out. Instead, a voice came into his mind, a dominant voice which demanded to be obeyed.

- No. You will not speak to him. You will never speak about me to any of them. -

The echo of the voice still in his mind, Spock stood alone on the transporter platform. McCoy turned to stand and watch him, curious. The Vulcan looked so dismayed that McCoy felt quite anxious. He touched Spock's arm and spoke quietly.

"Spock...Spock, are you all right?" No answer. "Are you in pain?"

The First Officer looked at him. He wanted to tell him about the voice, but as he spoke, he became painfully aware that the words were not his. "I am all right, Doctor. Don't trouble yourself."

Shaking his arm free from McCoy's hand, the Vulcan brushed past him to follow Kirk and Sulu to the bridge, aware now that not only his thoughts but his actions, too, were under an alien control.

All Spock could do was obey.

Bork relaxed in the mind link. So far, his mission was successful. He had left the dead forest far behind him. In pure energy he had merged with this alien and only he knew he was here. Soon the alien would die, and he, Bork, would take his place. He would take over control of the body, and no-one would ever know of the alien's death.

"Transportation of supplies complete, Captain."

"Very well, Mr. Sulu. Take us out of orbit. Set course for Starbase Four, warp one."

"Aye, aye, Captain." Sulu's hands darted across the dials in front of him, the Enterprise silently responding to its new orders.

Spock sat very still at his station, his eyes fixed on the screen, watching as the planet shrank smaller and smaller, only at last to wink out of existence. Then the voice returned.

- At last I am free. I have severed my chains to the old ones. -

Painfully, Spock summoned his telepathic skills in an attempt to contact the alien creature within him. But once again the savage voice spoke. - What...you...alien, are you listening? -

Spock was determined. - Who are you? -

- I am Bork, son of Zukas. But you need not concern yourself. I am here to take over your life. You are going to die, and no-one will ever know. -

The cold hatred in the voice was all too obvious to Spock. Now he was alone with this alien thing - there was no way he could ask for help - he was totally alone. Again Spock asserted the mind link.

- You will not succeed. I will fight you. I can defeat you. -

- You will not. I am Bork. There is nothing I cannot make you do. -

Spock's body wouldn't do what he wanted. He couldn't speak, he couldn't move. All around him the humans went on with their work,

totally unaware that Spock was fighting for his life - and losing.

"Mr. Spock...SPOCK!" The voice cut into his mind, dissolving the link with Bork.

"Yes, Captain?"

Kirk sat back in his command chair, watching his First Officer intently. It was not like Spock to have to be told twice. But he dismissed the thought.

"Mr. Spock, I want a brief report on Kreil - and the footprints, to the effect that our sensor readings show no life forms on the planet and we have no theory as to what caused the prints."

Spock nodded. "Yes, sir. I'll start it right away." He got out of his chair and turned to leave. The truth was that Spock was in pain, and it was getting worse. His head throbbed continually and there was a great heat at the back of his eyes. It seemed the alien was true to his word. It wanted him dead.

Uhura half turned in her chair to face him. "Excuse me, sir."

Spock interrupted her briefly. "Not now, Lieutenant." But Uhura persisted:

"Sir, you did ask me for the analysis of Kreil's magnetic core as soon as the science department..."

Spock shouted at her, his voice harsh, snarling. "I said not now!"

All noise on the bridge stopped. Kirk's jaw dropped. Everyone turned to stare at the Vulcan as he walked quickly into the turbo-elevator. As Spock left, Kirk hurriedly closed his mouth. Uhura turned to him in amazement. "What did I say?"

The Captain shook his head. "Can't imagine." He sat regarding the elevator a few seconds longer then came to a decision. Climbing out of the chair he headed for the door. "Mr. Scott, you have the con. I'll possibly be in Mr. Spock's quarters, but I wouldn't bet on it."

As soon as the doors closed behind him a babble of indignant voices broke out in criticism of the absent First Officer.

"Jim!" Kirk halted and turned to face McCoy. The Doctor looked very concerned.

"Yes, Bones, what can I do for you?"

The Doctor hesitated for a few seconds, then he shrugged. "It's Spock. There's something wrong with him. He behaved strangely in the transporter room when we beamed up from Kreil, but...well, I've just spoken to him. I asked if I could help with his report on Kreil. He told me to shut up and get out."

Kirk shook his head. "That doesn't sound like him at all, but he's just been shouting at Uhura. Where is he now?"

McCoy indicated a briefing room. "He's in there. I did take a reading on him, Jim. There's nothing physically wrong."

The Captain nodded. That meant he was totally in the dark. He'd just have to hope he'd ask the right questions.

Since McCoy left, Spock had been sitting alone. Steadily he had continued dictating his report. He watched, slightly distracted as the computer turned his voice into taped words. The Captain would be able to read the report whenever he had the time. A sudden thought struck the Vulcan. The intense pain had gone, and try as he might, he couldn't re-establish contact with Bork. Yet he knew the alien was still there. Perhaps Bork had to rest sometimes. It must be a considerable strain, trying to maintain such mental pressure on his host. A new hope rose in the Vulcan. If he spoke to Kirk the pain would come back. But suppose he left a written message? That Bork understood written symbols was highly unlikely - especially if they were Vulcan symbols.

Quickly, the Science Officer disengaged the computer and changed the key board from English to Vulcan symbols. He typed a brief, two word message. It was all he dared to write. Deep inside his mind, Bork was coming to life once more. When the Captain came into the room, Spock's pain was already twice as bad as before. The Vulcan began to stand, but Kirk signalled him to remain seated.

"Spock, within these last thirty minutes or so you have behaved totally out of character. You have jumped down the throats of two people. I would like to know why."

Spock sat still. He would not - could not - respond. At that moment his surroundings looked very unreal to him, and his concentration was wandering. He was remembering a time long past, when he was surrounded by tall green trees and the sky was two different shades of grey. The human hand on his shoulder awakened him from his dream and brought him back to harsh reality. It had been Bork's memory, not his. That was what Krail had looked like many years ago. And now Bork was making his escape.

"Spock, if there is something wrong, please tell me. I'd like to help."

The Vulcan looked into the human's eyes, hoping Kirk would sense his pain. But Kirk was human and insensitive to telepathic feelings. Bork took control of Spock and shook his head. "I am sorry if I have disturbed you, Captain. There is nothing wrong."

Something in the Vulcan's voice disturbed Kirk. His friend seemed harsh, abrupt. But Spock found he had control once again and this time Kirk found that the Vulcan's quiet, gentle tones were back.

"I have the report you wanted on Krail, Captain. It is not very long. May I suggest that you read it now."

Kirk took the tape that Spock held out to him. He glanced down at it in his hands for a few seconds then turned and walked towards the door. Half way he stopped and turned to face his friend once more. "Spock, if I ask McCoy to give you a medical examination, would you object?"

Spock expected the alien to complain but the mind link stayed broken - only the pain persisted. "No, sir, I would not object."

Kirk sighed. Obviously the compromise of McCoy's examination would have to do, but he tried once more. "If something was wrong, you would come to me, wouldn't you?"

Spock spoke very carefully. "I would let you know, Jim."

When the Captain left, the pain became twice as severe as before. The Science Officer thought for a while and decided to go to his quarters. Perhaps Bork would let him rest.

The door closed quietly behind him and once again Spock was alone with the alien creature. In his confusion he still had his tricorder with him. It was as he was setting it down that the voice spoke to him again.

- Are you tired? -

The question startled him. - Why do you ask? -

Again the voice came. - Soon you will be exhausted. -

- Why? -

Bork's reply was both harsh and cruel. - I am going to tear your soul apart. -

Instantly, the pain became almost unbearable, even for a Vulcan. All the horrors of the Universe, all the worst pain he had ever experienced, were thrust upon Spock by the thing inside him. The Vulcan collapsed in agony, but still Bork couldn't wrench a single scream from Spock.

James T. Kirk sat deep in thought as he slowly pushed the button in front of him to turn the mechanical page. Sometimes when he wasn't

sure about what to do he would turn to the classics. On this occasion the viewing screen in his quarters held one of Tennyson's poems, 'In Memoriam'. As the Enterprise moved steadily through the star cluster, Kirk was totally absorbed in the poem.

'The path by which we twain did go,  
Which led by tracts that pleased us well,  
Tro' four sweet years arose and fell,  
From flower to flower, from snow to snow...

But where the path we walk'd began  
To slant the fifth autumnal slope,  
As we descended following Hope,  
There sat the Shadow fear'd of man; '

"Uhura to Captain Kirk."

The Captain jumped at the sudden interruption. He touched a switch. "Yes, Lieutenant."

"I have a message from Mr. Thompson on Krail, sir. He thought you might like to know that the footprints you saw have vanished and no new ones have appeared. If I may say so, Captain," she added, "it appears the Yeti have flown."

Kirk laughed. "More likely Thompson's just impatient. After all, it hasn't been that long since we left. Still, thank him for the information. Kirk out."

With difficulty, he drew his attention back to the poem, but his mood had already been broken. The next two verses shattered it completely.

'Who broke our fair companionship  
And spread his mantle dark and cold,  
And wrapt thee formless in the fold,  
And dull'd the murmur on thy lip,

And bore thee where I could not see  
Nor follow, tho' I walk in haste,  
And think, that somewhere in the waste  
The Shadow sits and waits for me.'

The screen went blank. For his present mood the poem was too depressing. He was still worried about Spock. Something was definitely wrong and it upset Kirk that his friend obviously didn't want to tell him about it. Kirk shook his head. What he needed was something to bring him back to normality.

He removed the poem and inserted Spock's report on Krail. Quickly, he glanced over it, not taking much in since the report was only routine. Only routine - yet when he saw what had been typed at the end of the report, his nerves began to tingle. Kirk was pretty hopeless at speaking the Vulcan language and Spock had often despaired of him. But with the reading of Vulcan, Kirk was in his element. There was no mistaking the meaning of the words. As if in a dream he saw the expression on the Vulcan's face when he had questioned him earlier, and this time, he understood. In Spock's eyes he had been looking at desperation - perhaps loneliness. What was it he had asked him - "If something was wrong, you would come to me, wouldn't you?" The Vulcan's quiet reply echoed in his mind. "I would let you know, Jim." And that was exactly what he had done. He had let him know with two words, quickly written in Vulcan - "Tel Hi" - "Help me!"

After much searching he found the Vulcan on the observation deck. He was standing very still against the wall, his eyes fixed on the panorama visible through the transparent screen. Kirk's relief at

finding his friend took a sudden downward plunge. Spock's usually bright eyes were dull and heavy. His skin was far from its normal colour, in fact he looked a lot paler than an average human.

"Spock!"

There was no reply. He gripped the Vulcan tightly by the shoulders and shook him. "Spock, for God's sake, look at me!"

Spock sighed, yet his eyes remained fixed on the screen; but when he spoke, his voice was soft.

"Look out there," he whispered. "The star fields in Sagittarius. Thousands and thousands of stars - so many they appear to shine as one. I never thought the Universe could be so beautiful."

Kirk was amazed. "What are you saying? What's wrong?"

The Vulcan frowned, and his gaze shifted from the star field to Kirk's eyes. The frown turned into a look of puzzlement, then one of contempt. Kirk saw the expression, and it horrified him. He gasped, partly in disbelief and partly in pain as Spock's right hand struck him full in the face. Staggering against the wall, Kirk grabbed for his phaser, but a Vulcan's reflexes are far quicker. Spock rushed the Captain and pinned him to the transparent screen. As Kirk struggled to free himself the Vulcan began to laugh - a vicious, cruel laugh. "You cannot escape me, human. I have decided and I shall have this Starship."

Kirk found it difficult to speak. All he said was, "Spock... how?"

Again the Vulcan laughed as he sent Kirk crashing to the floor. "Spock...I am not Spock. I have destroyed this body's original host. I am Bork, son of Zukas, last one of Kreil's children." He stood over the felled human. "I shall have this ship." Then he was gone, the door snapping shut.

Kirk stayed where he was for a few stunned moments as he thought over the last day's events. The truth dawned on him with the force of a super nove. There had been a creature on Kreil - but it wasn't on Kreil any more. It was on board the Enterprise within Spock's body. At that moment, Kirk's despair was absolute.

Spock was dead.

McCoy leaned back in his chair. He found the situation quite unreal, yet he knew the Captain's story was all too possible. Such things had been known on board the Enterprise before - but never with such brutal harshness. Sadly enough, the incident had been confirmed by the tricorder Kirk had found in Spock's quarters. While the two men had been standing in the building on Kreil, it had recorded a burst of energy, lasting only a fraction of a second it was true, but it was there, and the computer confirmed it had been absorbed by Spock. The computer had also confirmed that there was no possible way of reversing the process. Suddenly, the Universe seemed a vast, empty place to Leonard McCoy. He leaned forward and pushed a button.

"McCoy to Captain Kirk."

"I'm on the bridge, Bones."

McCoy glanced at the man on the screen, then looked away quickly. The hurt on Kirk's face was more than he could bear. "I'm in my quarters, Jim. Will you come and see me? There's something I have to tell you."

"Can't you tell me now?"

"No."

Kirk nodded. When McCoy was a definite as that, he was worth listening to. "I'll be right there."

The screen went blank.

The Doctor rose and peed the room. The Captain had ordered Security to search for the Vulcan but the full story had not been explained to them. Only he and the Captain knew of Bork's existence.

The crew merely thought that Spock was insane. Then there was the Captain's private agony - he believed Spock to be dead. McCoy had to tell him now that Spock was alive.

The buzzer sounded. McCoy went to the door and opened it.

Kirk looked tired, but determined. "Bones, whatever it is, make it quick. I've got to go and look for him." His voice held great hatred.

McCoy spoke quietly. "You don't have to look any more, Jim. I know exactly where he is."

Kirk seemed to become even more determined and his voice was harsh. "Where?...Where is he?"

McCoy stood aside and nodded inside his room. "He's in there."

"He's what?" Kirk pushed past the surgeon, his mind in a whirl. Didn't Bones realise Bork was a killer? He drew his phaser.

"Jim!" Kirk heard McCoy's desperate plea from a distance. The hand that held the phaser fell limp at his side. He stared with feelings of relief and despair at the sleeping figure on the bed. Relief, because he knew instinctively that this really was Spock - he didn't have to wake him or speak to him - he just knew. And despair, because he didn't know how to help him. There was no way he could set him free. He sat on the edge of the bed, unmoving. Gradually he became aware of McCoy.

"He's exhausted, Jim. But he was able to tell me that Bork has reached the limit of his power. He can't force Spock out of his body. But neither can Spock push Bork out. Their strength is equal and Bork can't exist without a body anywhere except Krail. And as we know, Jim, Krail is a dead world."

Kirk sighed. Spock's fate seemed well and truly sealed. He had to live with a demon tearing at his mind for the rest of his life. Kirk leaned over to the intercom. "Mr. Chekov, plot a course back to Krail. Warp seven."

Chekov's puzzlement was obvious. "Krail, Captain?"

"Yes, mister, back to Krail."

"Warp seven's going it a bit, Jim."

"We have to, Bones. I don't know what we're going to do, but if Krail is the only place Bork can leave Spock's body, then we are obviously going to have to be there."

"But what if we can't get Bork to leave? Krail is dead."

Kirk turned to watch the sleeping Vulcan. "If we fail, there's only one other thing I can do for Spock." His voice sank to a whisper. "I'll have to kill him."

Sulu glanced up at the screen and then at the dials on the board in front of him. Satisfied, he signalled the transporter room.

"Bridge to Captain Kirk."

"Yes, Mr. Sulu."

"We've achieved standard orbit around Krail, sir."

"Very well. Maintain your position." Kirk turned away from the intercom to face the group of security guards who were trying desperately to keep Spock in one place. Obviously Bork knew where they were and it was pretty clear that he wanted to be somewhere else.

Scott was at the controls, carefully checking the settings. Along with the bridge crew he was now completely aware of the situation and he realised the landing party might need to beam up in a hurry if they did set Spock free.

Kirk studied the battle that was still going on and decided the sooner they beamed down the better. The four security guards might just lose.

"Are you ready, Scotty?"

"Aye, sir. You'll beam down at the position you left Mr. Thompson's tea."

"Very well. Security detail! Dr. McCoy?"

McCoy joined Kirk on the transporter. The security detail had some difficulty however, since Spock was making it quite clear that he wanted to go the other way. But they finally managed to pin him to the platform by a remarkable piece of engineering. The two heaviest guards set on him.

"Energise."

Scott sighed with relief as the landing party vanished. Silence really was golden.

A few seconds later, however, and the planet's surface became more noisy than it had been for several centuries. The four guards were yet again occupied by the Vulcan whose great strength was increased by Bork's violent emotion. But Kirk had noticed a change in the alien's attitude. No longer was Bork motivated by his savage contempt for the humans around him. In Spock's face - Bork's face - Kirk saw great fear. He had a sudden idea.

"Let him go."

"Sir?" The security chief couldn't have been more surprised if the Captain had ordered them to kiss Spock.

"You understand English, Chief? Let him go!"

He did so, but for both Spock and Bork, the battle had only begun. The Vulcan was on his knees, his hands clutching at his head. He screamed - and the voice was Bork's. "Barbarian! Why won't you die?"

Kirk knelt in front of him, his voice harsh. "Bork, we don't want you on our ship. Leave that body. You have no right to murder."

The Vulcan seemed a good deal calmer, but it was still Bork who answered. It was only one word, but it destroyed all hope in Kirk, for it was a final answer, of that there was no doubt.

"Never."

They were perhaps fifty feet away from the cliff edge, at the very place Spock had stood and admired the view only a few days before. And Spock knew it. He also knew the one thing that could possibly drive Bork out of his body. It might work, it might not, but there was one certainty. He couldn't live with the intense pain Bork was inflicting on him. The mental agony was tremendous.

Of what happened next, Kirk was never very sure, except that at that moment, he knew Bork had lost. It was Spock who stood and turned to face the cliff, and it was Spock who suddenly started running faster and faster towards the edge. Kirk could only stand and watch in horror as his friend reached the brink of the cliff - and finally disappeared over it.

Kirk felt something snap in the pit of his stomach. He had just lived through his worst nightmare and his mind refused to believe it. Griefstricken, he sank to his knees, staring in disbelief at the silver translucent cloud that had risen from the cliff edge. It hovered for the briefest of seconds - then it was gone. From far away, they heard the sound of a large, demented creature, crashing through the dead forest. Then there was silence.

McCoy came rushing to the Captain, his concern for Kirk mingling with his own grief at their loss of Spock. But Kirk pushed him gently aside. He could never explain how he knew what he did...he just knew. Climbing to his feet, he hurried to the cliff and looked over the edge.

"Jim! How much longer are you going to be? I can't hang on here indefinitely."

Kirk stared in relief at the Vulcan kneeling on the narrow ledge on the cliff face. Yet all he could do, was to turn to the puzzled group behind him and ask,

"Will someone please fetch the Commander a rope?"

Johnston the security chief stood in front of Kirk's command chair. He was finding the Captain difficult to talk to.

"Mt. Thompson is quite angry at being ordered to leave Krail, sir. He wants to speak to you."

"Chief, you are making my life a misery."

"Yes, sir.....What will you tell him?"

Kirk considered carefully. "You can tell him what you like, but I don't want to see him. Now vanish, before I set Mr. Spock on you again." Johnston vanished.

Kirk got up and walked over to stand beside his First Officer.

"Spock, one question."

"Yes, sir?"

"If Bork was such a scientific genius, why was he so primitive?"

After a few moments of thought, Spock replied. "His mind was highly developed, but his body was not. The Yeti's hands were imperfect. They could not grip, therefore the physical building of a civilisation was impossible. The only thing they could do was to kill one another. Humanity was once like that, Jim, but in the opposite sense. It seemed that at one time the only thing your race could do with their minds was to kill. Their limited scientific knowledge enabled them to build bigger and more efficient weapons. But thankfully the dawning of the 'Space Age' provided a more worthwhile cause for their science."

Kirk nodded,. "Yes, but what of Bork?"

"He is dead."

"Really? How do you know?"

Spock was silent for a while, then..."I know."

He turned in his chair so that no-one else but Kirk could see the look of agony and horror on his face. There was also a faint flicker of sadness, but Kirk knew why. Bork had been a lonely creature, seeking liberation from a dead world - and the company of others. Spock had understood. But then the instant had gone, and Spock was himself again.

But neither he nor Kirk ever forgot the very last Yeti of all.

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